DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 440 CS 208 458

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TITLE Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A "Chicago Tribune" Reporter Covers Women in Politics.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Females; *Feminism; *Journalism; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; *Politics; United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Herrick (Genevieve Forbes); *Journalism History

ABSTRACT

Genevieve Forbes Herrick was one of the foremost women reporters of the "Chicago Tribune" during the 1920s and 1930s. Noted for her particular and consistent attention to women in national politics, her earliest political articles appeared in 1922, when she covered the Cook County primaries with an eye toward women contenders running against the Chicago political machine. She then covered the campaign of Ruth Hannah McCormick for the House of Representatives, and the succession of Hattie Caraway to her husband's United States Senate seat. Herrick occasionally used her own reactions and responses as a way of dramatizing the status of women involved in politics, and she often took a critical, even mocking, view of the political process. In her coverage of both parties' presidential conventions in 1928 and in 1932, her analyses hinged on contrasting the parties' treatment of women, and in dispelling the myth of a women's voting bloc. She was greatly concerned when women in politics refused to be interviewed, and delighted in reporting the weekly press conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Herrick's close friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt annoyed the "Tribune" publisher, who was opposed to Roosevelt and the New Deal, and ultimately caused Herrick to resign. Well after her resignation, the "Tribune" continued to report on her exploits, her visits to Chicago, and her speeches as president of the Women's National Press Club. Her reporting shrewdly analyzed the evolving role and status of women, and offered instructive models for women entering the political arena. (HTH)

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# GENEVIEVE FORBES HERRICK: A CHICAGO TRIBUNE REPORTER COVERS WOMEN IN POLITICS

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Presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, Status of Women Committee, Gainesville, August, 1984.

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In 1923 a twenty-nine year old Chicago Tribune "lady reporter" was assigned to interview the wives of two presidential hopefuls. Now in the classic fairy tale, the reporter admitted, the novice would have astonished everyone by casually bringing in the tough assignment, the one that had thwarted all the hard-boiled veterans. But this did not, in fact, happen here. Although she tried every trick taught by her college journalism professors, Genevieve Forbes could not persuade either women to talk.[1]

The incident apparently represents a rare journalistic failure on the part of Genevieve Forbes (later, Herrick), and even this at least resulted in an amusing, self-mocking satire. In subsequent years Herrick managed to cover successfully quite a few political events, issues, and people, although there were other political wives who gave her a hard time.

Herrick was best known by her Tribune readers and colleagues for her crisp vernacular stories on crime, especially gangsters and murderers; these were the stories that won her front page status. But she was justifiably taken seriously on the political beat. More importantly for the purposes here, in consistently paying particular attention to women in politics at the national level (not simply as political wives and hostesses but also as officeholders and organizational leaders) her work was undoubtedly instructive to newly enfranchised women readers who were still defining their political responsibilities.

This paper will examine the political reporting by Genevieve Forbes Herrick as a way of showing what one of Chicago's best-known women reporters of the 1920s and 1930s said about the emerging role of women in politics. As this paper will show, Herrick becomes interesting for what she represents about the position of a

woman who, on one hand, worked hard to establish and maintain a reputation as a professional front-page reporter (that is, not a "sob sister"), but on the other, addressed issues she personally seemed to feel were relevant to women. Indeed, Herrick's personal commitments ultimately jeopardized her career.

This paper is based on a reading of all of Herrick's by-lined articles published in the Tribune, 1921-1934, as well as much of her magazine work. The paper also relies on her letters, diaries, and on recollections of various colleagues and relatives.[2] Nothing of a scholarly nature has been published about Genevieve Herrick, although several popular books about journalism mention her. Ishbel Ross, in her well-known Women of the Press, opens her chapter on Chicago journalists with an extended discussion of Herrick. Ross says, "Her talent was evident at once. She skyrocketed to fame in journalistic circles because of her clear and sparkling style, her vivid way of finding the right phrase, her instinct for handling news."[3]

Born in 1894, she graduated from Chicago's Lakeview High School. In 1916 she earned her bachelor's degree from Northwestern University, where she was the first woman editor-in-chief of the school's daily; and the following year earned her master's from the University of Chicago. After teaching high school English for a year, she came to the Tribune in 1918 as assistant to the exchange editor, and in 1920 was made assistant literary editor. But in October 1921 she made a tremendous splash with her thirteen-part exposé of the United States immigration service. She had gone to Ireland and then returned, steerage class, posing as an immigrant. Her articles and testimony provided the basis for a House investigation of Ellis Island.[4]

Her earliest political article appeared the next year, when she covered the 1922 Cook County primaries with an eye to women contenders running against

the machine. Their position was, according to Herrick, that the issues at hand were preeminently women's issues; on the other, the organization would not run just "any" woman, simply on account of sex.[5] After the primaries Herrick quoted one successful county commissioner nominee saying, "But we want women to vote for us because they think we are well-fitted for the job, not because we are women."[6]

Her political writing became much more frequent after Genevieve and John Herrick (their romance apparently blossomed while they were covering the 1924 Leopold-Loeb trial and they married shortly after the trial) moved to the East coast. A number of articles on Ruth Hanna McCormick, an Illinois Republican (daughter and wife of senators)who successfully ran for the House in 1928, stress what was to become a common theme: "Mrs. McCormick, hopeful that her candidacy will be an incentive to feminine participation in the specific affairs of government, is running as a woman; but she is not running, and she makes this plain, as a woman's candidate."[7] Herrick went on to explain Mrs. McCormick's opposition to the notion of a woman's partisan bloc.

The half-dozen articles on Mrs. McCormick's unsuccessful 1930 Senate race clearly show Herrick's respect for the woman making the first serious sustained bid for the position, and for McCormick's political savvy and mental, as well as physical, toughness. Herrick emphasized McCormick's disdain for the usual cliches about women as Uncle Sam's housekeepers. "She avoids fluttery draperies in her speech as carefully as she avoids geegaws in her dress," Herrick exclaimed, illustrating the point with a number of anecdotes.[8]

In December 1931 a woman finally found herself in the Senate but it was as a result of the death of her husband. Given the circumstances of Hattie Caraway's appointment, Herrick commented, "She was making history but she didn't seem very

happy about it."[9] Acutely aware that records were being made and always interested in dramatizing women's political "firsts," Herrick was disappointed. The contrast to Ruth McCormick was clear. One article described how, as a member of a commerce committee conducting a hearing on a cosmetics bill, Sen. Caraway (D-Ark.) was in the position of explaining rouge and powder to her mystified male colleagues. The discussion of how men gallantly presented sample tubes of depilatories to the "lady senator" was amusing--but Herrick was ambivalent at best.[10]

Herrick regularly noted that women resented being packaged as part of some woman's bloc, not only by voters but also by reporters. One of her articles on Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins recalled that Sec. Perkins had requested newspapers not to send feature writers or "sob sisters" to her first press conference; she wanted to be treated as news.[11] Actually Herrick seems to have poked fun at herself with a separate feature story on Mrs. Perkins published the same day which was replete with physical description: "Of medium height and a bit plump, [Mrs. Perkins] dressed well, usually in black, with a dab of white in the right places." But Herrick added, "Quiz her about wages or unemployment and she'll talk for an hour. Ask her what's her favorite salad and she'll become as Boston as the brown bag she carries."[12]

Indeed Herrick occasionally used her own reactions and responses as a way of understanding and dramatizing the status of women involved in politics. For example, one article began, "A comely young woman in pretty pink, with a tousled black bob, stepped to the front of the convention platform last night, and we mused, enviously and indulgently, 'Gosh, that's a good looking girl.'" But when Jean Whittemore, the only woman on the powerful resolutions committee, explained why she signed the Democrats' majority report favoring legalization

of alcohol, Herrick admitted,"We forgot that she was pretty, remembered only that she was in dead deep earnest. The switch, it seems to me, was really a fine compliment."[13]

Herrick covered both parties' conventions in 1928 and 1932, her analyses for the most part hinging on the parties' treatment of women, but continuing to dispel the myth of a woman's bloc. When only half as many women were delegates to the 1928 Republican convention as had attended in 1924, Herrick offered her "theory": before, when Coolidge was clearly the candidate, men could let women go for a ride. "This year, with a bang-up scrap predicted, no man is going to get up and give a lady his seat."[14] Another article quoted several women angry that the platform ignored women's issues: "Republican women...are not abundantly rejoiceful tonight over the party platform into which they had hoped to drive a few nails, but which, they now declare, seems to be entirely the handiwork of masculine carpenters."[15] Women left the convention with some pretty souvenirs, Herrick suggested the next day, but not much else.[16]

Four years later Herrick sounded similar themes, flatly stating even before the Chicago conventions began that "Not posies but power is the demand of the women...."[17] Again she demonstrated that women worked for different and sometimes opposing causes--but they all wanted authority. In an article unusual for its explicitly editorial commentary, Herrick reported that an hour-long keynote address mentioned women only once: "Republican men regard Republican women as their noblest allies." Remarking that the twenty seconds required to say those nine words reflected the sex ratio attending the convention, Herrick added acidly, "The 'woman angle' ought to be covered by a dressmaker, not a reporter."[18] Finally, bringing her coverage full circle in describing women who attempted to participate in the proceedings, Herrick suggested that the typical committeeman

wanted a woman who would wear his flowers and not question his votes.[19]

If Republican women rode the elephant around whichever man led it, each Democratic woman climbed on her own donkey, Herrick gleefully claimed. They participated in the caucuses, addressed the resolutions committee, and dared criticize Huey ("Kingfish") Long.[20] Indeed the keynote address of Senator Alben Barkley always referred to "men and women," Herrick said, "never once fenc[ing] off the women in the party in any flowery bower of isolation."[21]

Herrick covered other sorts of conferences, again her specialty appearing to be women's organizations and issues. She reported on several annual conventions of the Daughters of the American Revolution, although she somewhat mocked their disclaimers of political sophistication. Yet she also covered the National Woman's Party, a fairly strong-minded feminist group which sponsored the original equal rights amendment. She carefully explained why that organization opposed protective legislation for women (as putting women at a competitive disadvantage in the labor market).[22] And she even-handedly reported Mrs. Roosevelt's criticism of the group for ignoring physical differences between the sexes and therefore the necessity of such legislation.[23] Herrick wrote a series on a White House conference on child health, a series on a conference on the cause and cure of war, and on the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

There was a part of Genevieve Herrick, it should be noted, that stood back and mocked the national political process. In December 1928 the Tribune began publishing Herrick's twelve part series, "Washington--Democracy's Drawing Room," on the intersection of society and politics. It was an intricate historical and sociological portrait of the struggle for status waged by newcomers hoping to penetrate the inner circle of Washington "cave-dwellers." For example, one part

analyzed the social secretary, "the partisan policeman who stands at the cross-roads of obscurity and distinction [directing] feverish two-way traffic.... This woman of importance has duties more complex than the masculine jobs of taking care of the nation's budget...or figuring out the tonnage of battleships. She is a fashion expert, a politician, and, above all, a historian with a long cruel memory."[24]

As it turned out, Herrick soon became friendly with quite a few political folk. But as much as she came to feel flattered by the attention of the "cave-dwellers," and she loved to socialize, she retained a certain degree of detachment. Her first loyalty was to her profession; the question for her at any social gathering was whether or not there was a story to be mined.

From 1931 to 1933 a major story was the movement to repeal the Prohibition Amendment. Herrick covered this from several angles, although most of her articles essentially supported the Tribune's editorial position that prohibition was a mistake and that 3.2% beer and saloons were preferable to illegal whiskey and speakeasies. Either way she paid attention to women's participation, covering both the National Woman's Democratic Law Enforcement League and the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, and often noting that both sides claimed the unanimous support of "right-thinking" women.[25] Her lead on the latter's 1932 convention read "Half a million women fighting for repeal of the eighteenth amendment today gave warning...that they will tolerate no lukewarm moistness in the coming presidential election; that they will insist on red hot wetness." She added, "The metaphor is mixed, the idea is plain."[26]

Occasionally Herrick complained about the treatment of women reporters by men, especially male press secretaries.[27] But she was more concerned when women refused to be interviewed. She implied that these women, as models, as prominent

citizens, as new voters, as political figures or wives of political figures, had a responsibility to talk to her, to be accessible through the newspaper columns. Herrick rarely mentioned Alice Roosevelt Longworth without disparaging her unwillingness to talk to the press. She provided all the gory details when Dolly Curtis Gann, who had been so amiable while lobbying for her brother's renomination as Vice-President, turned cold shoulder to reporters once he had won. "All the stored animus that she must have had against her brother's political foes was redirected at the newspaper women who asked for a brief moment of her time...(S)he was impatient, evasive, angry."[28]

On the Democratic side Herrick reported that Mrs. Al Smith could only utter "a few fragmentary syllables about weather and radio which a committee of secretaries and censors and advisers sieved through their sagacious political screens...."[29] Herrick admitted that Mrs. Smith had grown up believing women's place was the home, so she probably had nothing to say. But Herrick was not so much professionally frustrated (she could always turn silence into a story) as she was distressed that a woman of Mrs. Smith's political stature would be so empty-headed.

In contrast, then, Herrick delighted in reporting the weekly press conferences that Eleanor Roosevelt inaugurated in 1933. Herrick, along with some 35 other women, was there from the first, when the message was that, in a time of crisis, "woman's duty is the same as man's: to exhibit courage and common sense."[30] Herrick cheerfully presented the First Lady as an unpretentious, earnest, hospitable, intelligent woman concerned about broad social problems as well as minor domestic ones--from her dog to her children. In theory the press conferences skirted politics, but Herrick's accounts show them tackling all sorts of issues. Herrick occasionally mocked her colleagues' interest in trivia, once noting that

Mrs. Roosevelt wanted to discuss a West Virginia farm experiment, "but the ladies of the press were eager to talk about food and functions."[31]

The reporters were certainly grateful for this access to and respect from the White House. Herrick contrasted the Roosevelt administration to previous regimes, when "the girl with the pencil was treated like an upper servant...."[32] It was "a new deal." Indeed, Herrick presented the all-woman press conferences as a boon to employment of women. Herrick claimed that after Mrs. Roosevelt announced her plan, four women were signed as free-lance writers and a large wire service hired a woman for its Washington bureau.[33]

The women particularly appreciated Mrs. Roosevelt's attempts to give them scoops. Because it was Mrs. Roosevelt who announced the decision to serve beer at the White House, "it was the newspaper women, not the newspaper men, who got the story," Herrick chuckled.[34] When "the girls" complained that "the boys" would scoop them on whether the White House would serve hard liquor, Mrs. Roosevelt promised that she would again make the first announcement at her press conference.[35]

Clearly Mrs. Roosevelt enjoyed a good relationship with the women who covered her.[36] She became friendly with several reporters, not the least of which was Genevieve Herrick, whom she addressed--as did nearly everyone else, including the press--as "Geno." As the above may suggest, Herrick's coverage of the press conferences was neutral to congratulatory.

Ultimately the friendship got her into trouble with Tribune publisher Colonel Robert McCormick, who was well-known for his vehement opposition to President Roosevelt and to New Deal politics. In May 1934 McCormick accused her of being "social subsidized," particularly with respect to stories on Mrs. Roosevelt. Herrick bitterly resented the criticism, but immediately resigned

from the Tribune and from her Sunday radio talk on the Tribune-owned WGN. Indeed, she wrote McCormick, "...I have, more than once, submerged my own reactions to conditions and facts in order that I might write a piece that would conform to Tribune's reactions. That is, of course, what a reporter should certainly do when he is on the payroll; but there is a point beyond which he cannot go, when it involves a presentation which he or she does not believe to be justified by the facts as the reporter finds them."[37]

It may be that McCormick had not actually sought her resignation. India Moffitt Edwards, a friend of Herrick and former Tribune women's page editor who went on to work for the National Democratic Committee, says that McCormick, much as he opposed the Democratic Party, still tolerated them on his staff.[38] It may be that Mrs. Herrick was looking for an excuse to do a different kind of writing. In any case she continued to be quite close to Mrs. Roosevelt, the two exchanging cards and gifts, as well as information presumed to be of interest to the other.[39] Geno and her husband John, who severed relations with the Tribune shortly afterwards and went to work for the Department of the Interior, occasionally dined at the White House.

After leaving the Tribune, Herrick wrote a column for its sister paper, the New York Daily News, and she wrote for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA). Her articles, usually about politics and the Washington "scene," were published in many magazines, including Collier's and the Independent Woman. Between 1935 and 1942 she wrote a regular column "Women in the News," for Country Gentleman. This column reveals a continuing fascination for women of power and achievement. Again, as with the Tribune articles, she stressed the diversity of women's interests and skills, insisting that they did not constitute a bloc, much less a narrow-minded one. Her discussions of these news-makers took the form of personal

introductions--as if introducing people at a party. Indeed Herrick's columns were often the result of social gatherings she attended. But she was not name-dropping. Herrick seemed to be saying, these women are important role models--for us, for our daughters.

During World War II, she worked a short stint for the Treasury Department and as executive assistant and press relations chief for the Women's Army Corps. She was a writer for the News Division and then assistant chief and ultimately chief of the Magazine and Book Division of the Office of War Information. In 1946, as a publicity consultant, she toured WAC facilities in Europe, an experience she turned into several speeches and magazine articles.

In 1951 the Herricks moved to New Mexico, where John worked for a newspaper chain. Geno did publicity for a number of organizations, and wrote feature stories for local papers; but, as a result of increasingly serious ill health, she did little writing in the 1950s, especially after John's death in 1955. Genevieve Forbes Herrick died in Santa Fe in 1962.

Herrick's impact on the journalism profession is difficult to assess. Certainly the Tribune was proud of her. As Ishbel Ross notes, "For a decade her by-line. .was constantly on the front page of the Chicago Tribune, a guarantee of good writing and sound reporting."[40] In noting its employment of women, the Tribune always made much of Herrick; a 1927 promotional brochure published by the Tribune called "Why Women Read the News" discussed her second only to Sigrid Schultz, its Berlin correspondent.

Well after her resignation, the Tribune continued to report on Herrick's exploits, her visits to Chicago, and her speeches. Herrick was president of the Women's National Press Club 1933 to 1935. She helped found the Alliance of Business and Professional Women. She was close to a number of Washington women

journalists, especially the clique of newspaper gals who covered Mrs. Roosevelt. Author and newspaper woman Hope Ridings Miller, another Press Club president, says, "She was indeed a role model for us. She was very able and very popular."[41]

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze Herrick's non-political writing or her general philosophy about reporting and the place of women reporters. But given her front-page ambitions, Herrick's own explanation for her consistent focus on women is significant here. In introducing a Country Gentleman column, Herrick once noted that early women journalists had been confined to the "woman's angle;" then, as woman's sphere generally expanded, so did the ribbon on her typewriter. In her own day, Herrick said, the woman's angle was again important. "And today, many a woman competent to write about anything she pleases, pleases to write about women." Herrick anticipated that some "straight-news" sisters might think they had "graduated" from that. "But can a woman graduate from an interest in women?" Having been on both sides of this paper fence, Herrick could answer her own question: "It is sometimes well to write with a man's pen point. It is frequently wise to see with a woman's viewpoint."[42]

Certainly Herrick mastered the style of the Jazz Age journalist, her articles combining the grace of literary essays with the verve and vigor of sports writing. Whether interviewing Mrs. Al Capone or Mrs. Al Smith, Herrick clearly enjoyed her work, and this comes through in her breezy, anecdotal--but thoroughly unsentimental--style. It should be noted, however, that Herrick's attempts at other sorts of writing were less successful. In one month's time Genevieve and John Herrick wrote a shallow and self-consciously uncritical biography of William Jennings Bryan, published a few weeks after his death in 1925; the book is never mentioned in biographical accounts of the Herricks.[43] She never published her history of the Civil War; she also somewhat unsuccessfully tried her hand

at fiction.

If her immigration series and interviews with local gangsters and visiting queens were what made her reputation, these political articles are also significant. They show Herrick seriously as well as shrewdly analyzing the evolving role and status of women. Her work gave a certain credibility and authority to women already involved in politics, and it offered instructive models for how women could enter the national political area. Presumably these articles promoted understanding on the part of male readers unused to seeing women involved in politics apart from specific reform movements. And Herrick herself served as a model for women journalists hopeful of turning the "woman's angle" into front-page news.

ENDNOTES

1. Chicago Tribune, November 14, 1923, p. 5.

2. These diaries are in the posession of her nephew Preston Smith, whose assistance the authors wish to acknowledge.

3. Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press (New York: Harper & Bros., 1936) p. 539. Other books which refer to Herrick include: Lloyd Wendt, Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper (Rand McNally & Co: Chicago, 1979); Bess Furman, Washington Byline: The Personal History of a Newspaper Woman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); Frances Parkinson Keyes, Capital Kaleidoscope: The Story of a Washington Hostess (New York: Harper & Bros. 1937); and John J. McPhaul, Deadlines & Monkeyshines: The Fabled World of Chicago Journalism (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962).

4. Chicago Tribune, October 25, 1921, p. 1. All subsequent citations are to articles by Herrick published in the Chicago Tribune, unless otherwise noted.

5. January 19, 1922, p. 5.

6. April 13, 1928, p. 5.

7. March 19, 1928, p. 5.

8. April 6, 1930, pp. 1,6.

9. December 9, 1931, p. 7.

10. March 1, 1934, p. 11. Herrick appeared equally unimpressed when one of her heroines, Eleanor Roosevelt, solemnly decried deceptive advertising of cosmetics. October 24, 1933, p. 6.

11. April 3, 1933, p. 12; also September 10, 1933, part 8, p. 3.

12. April 3, 1933, p. 12.

13. June 30, 1932, p. 7.

14. June 11, 1928, p. 6.

15. June 15, 1928, p. 3.

16. June 16, 1928, p. 5.

17. June 5, 1932, p. 4.

18. June 15, 1932, p. 4.

19. June 16, 1932, p. 5.

20. June 25, 1932, p. 2; June 26, 1932, p. 5.

21. June 28, 1932, p. 3.

22. June 5, 1927, p. 29; May 31, 1931, p. 12; January 7, 1931, p. 8.

23. July 7, 1933, p. 17; December 27, 1933, p. 9.

24. February 10, 1929, Part 8, p. 5.

25. March 6, 1931, p. 2.

26. April 13, 1932, p. 6.

27. See September 10, 1933, Part 8, p. 3.

28. June 17, 1932, p. 6.

29. June 26, 1928, p. 1.

30. March 7, 1928, p. 1.

31. November 7, 1933, p. 19.

32. September 10, 1933, Part 8, p. 3.

33. February 28, 1933, p. 3. This was probably Ruby Black.

34. January 24, 1934, p. 3.

35. Ibid.

36. Maurine Beasley makes this point in her article on Lorena Hickok, who suggested the idea of the press conferences to Mrs. Roosevelt. "Lorena A. Hickok: Journalistic Influence on Eleanor Roosevelt," Journalism Quarterly, Vol 57:2 (Summer 1980), pp. 281-86.

37. The original letter of accusation sent by McCormick to Arthur Henning, also with the Tribune, has been lost, but Mrs. Herrick refers to this letter in her letter of resignation, dated May 21, 1934, contained in the Tribune files in Chicago. There are interesting parallels to Lorena Hickok, who resigned from the Associated Press believing that her intimate friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt did compromise her journalistic integrity. See Beasley, pp. 284-85.

    One might also note the case of John Boettiger, who had been sent to Washington as a Tribune correspondent to back up Arthur Henning. Lloyd Wendt explains that Boettiger was chosen specifically because he was seen as strong enough to resist President Roosevelt's charm. But Boettiger's usefulness apparently ended when he met Roosevelt's daughter Anna Roosevelt Dahl. He resigned, they both obtained divorces, and they were married in 1935. Wendt, p. 552-53,562.

38. Telephone conversation with India Moffitt Edwards, April, 1983.

39. Some of this correspondence is available in the Eleanor Roosevelt archives at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York.

40. Ross, p. 539.

41. Telephone conversation with Hope Ridings Miller, June, 1983.

42. "Women in the News," Country Gentleman, April 1937, p. 50.

43. Herrick, Genevieve F. and Herrick, John O., The Life of William Jennings Bryan (Chicago: Buxton Publishing House, 1925), 424 pp.

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